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Phase VI of Underground Utilities And Streetscape Project Brings Fresh Appearance To South End Of Parkway

At long last, Phase VI of the Underground Utilities and Streetscape Project is substantially complete. And in the opinion of many of those parties involved, the lasting improvements were worth the inconveniences.

The section of Parkway extending from the Gatlinburg Convention Center to the boundary of Great Smoky Mountains National Park now features the same aesthetic upgrades which enhance much of the rest of Parkway, including new streetlights, public sidewalks and furnishings, all without the clutter of utility lines and poles.

"We appreciate the patience and cooperation of the business community on the South end of town as well as our residents and visitors," said City Manager Cindy Cameron Ogle. "It has been a long, challenging undertaking which has required some sacrifices, a good bit of tolerance and a lot of faith, but I believe everyone can agree that the change in the look and feel of the entire project area is quite dramatic."

The difficult, detailed process of transforming the area began in mid-August of last year. At approximately 1,850 feet in length, Phase VI is the largest single Underground Phase to date. It included the construction of underground duct banks to house electrical, telephone and cable television lines on both sides of Parkway. Water and sewer improvements were also encompassed in the project.

The replacement of the steel bridge at the intersection of Parkway and Leconte Street was one of the most challenging components of Phase VI, including the widening of the turning radius from Parkway to Leconte Street.

The Underground Utilities and Streetscape Project was a joint effort of the City, the design firm Barge, Waggoner, Sumner and Cannon, Inc., the contractor Efficient Electric, and local utilities involved in the undertaking.

New street lighting, benches, trash receptacles and signage are strategically placed along the street and new sidewalk has been installed on public right-of-ways. Several planters have been placed to accommodate seasonal plantings and small trees.

Distinctive crosswalks will be installed in the area in July with updated signage also still to be added.

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Including the \$7.8 million that covers both design engineering and construction costs of Phase VI, the City of Gatlinburg and business community have now invested approximately \$24 million in the Underground Utilities and Streetscape Project, dating to the late 1990s with the development of the original master plan and Riverwalk/Aquarium area.

Property owners in the Phase VI area will be assessed 20 percent of the cost, approximately \$1.52 million, which may be paid over a 15 year timeframe or on a lump-sum basis.